



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Teton
National Park

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Grand Teton National Park News Release

Search and Rescue Conducted for Lost Skiers in Teton Backcountry

Grand Teton National Park rangers and Teton County Search and Rescue volunteers located two lost skiers after conducting an extensive search during Friday morning, February 24. Tracy Hiatt, age 26, of Jackson, Wyoming, and Mike O'Neil, age 27, of Teton Village, Wyoming, exited a backcountry gate off the summit of Rendezvous Mountain at the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort on Thursday afternoon, February 23. The pair intended to ski out-of-bounds in the vicinity of Four Pines, but unexpectedly spent a night in the backcountry after becoming disoriented in white-out conditions. Stormy weather and poor visibility left them unsure whether they had skied into the Rock Springs drainage to the south of the summit or dropped into Granite Canyon to the north.

Using a cell phone, Hiatt and O'Neil called a friend about 5:30 p.m. on Thursday to alert him that they were lost. Their friend notified Teton County Search and Rescue personnel at 6:05 p.m., who in turn notified the Teton Interagency Dispatch Center at Grand Teton National Park at 7:00 p.m. Teton County Search and Rescue administrator, Doug Meyers, was able to have a brief cell phone conversation with the disoriented skiers. After insuring that they were not injured, he instructed them to seek shelter from the wind for the night.

At 6:50 a.m. on Friday morning under low clouds and blowing snow from high winds, a search team from Teton County and Grand Teton rode the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort's aerial tram to the summit of Rendezvous Mountain to begin skiing in two separate directions (north into Granite Canyon and south into Rock Springs drainage) in search of the lost pair. In addition, park rangers staged snowmobiles at the mouth of Granite Canyon to intercept the skiers should they happen to pass that way. During the night, Hiatt and O'Neil dug two different snow caves and tried to stay warm. However, in each case they became cold and continued skiing. At some point, they were able to contact a trail groomer at the ski resort using a talk-about radio. They informed him that they were still unsure of their location, but intended to keep moving and attempt to ski out. Rescuers knew from that radio conversation that Hiatt and O'Neil had not stayed in one location overnight.

Park rangers and County rescue personnel located Hiatt and O'Neil in Granite Canyon near a backcountry patrol cabin at 9:30 a.m. Friday morning. Rescuers then accompanied the pair as they continued to ski toward the mouth of Granite Canyon where park rangers used snowmobiles to transport them to the Granite Canyon trailhead. They were eventually driven back to Teton Village in a ranger patrol vehicle.

Hiatt and O'Neil had some extra clothing, but little emergency gear with them to spend an unexpected night out in the backcountry. The avalanche conditions for Thursday and Friday were rated as "considerable" for upper elevations. A "considerable" rating means that dangerous unstable slabs exist on steep terrain on certain slope aspects. Under this rating, backcountry users are cautioned that human triggered avalanches are probable and natural release avalanches are possible.

Park rangers remind backcountry users that they should pay special attention to weather conditions, avalanche conditions, and their own emergency preparedness before entering the backcountry.

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